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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002223

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR NI

SUBJECT: KATSINA'S "WAYWARD" SEVEN

REF: A. ABUJA 2217 AND PREVIOUS

1B. 08 ABUJA 1016

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty
for reasons in sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Representatives of Katsina's People's Democratic Party (PDP) gathered December 6 to discuss how to respond to seven prominent Katsina politicians who signed a declaration calling on President Yar'Adua to resign. The PDP members reportedly decided to "punish" the "wayward" politicians, focusing their attention on the most prominent, former House Speaker Aminu Bello Masari. Despite the public statements, many privately agreed with the sentiments expressed in the document. Some Katsina residents appear to be already looking beyond their native son to consider post-Yar'Adua options. END SUMMARY.

PDP SEEKS TO PUNISH "WAYWARD" POLITICIANS

12. (SBU) According to December 7 local press reports, PDP representatives from Katsina's 34 local governments decided at a December 6 meeting to "punish" seven "wayward" Katsina politicians -- Dr. Usman Bugaje, Dr. Ishaq Idris Kurfi, Mutari Lawal, Aminu Masari, Bashir Idris Nadabo, Kabir Yahaya, and Sadiq Yar'Adua -- for signing a document, entitled "President Yar'Adua's Health Condition and the State of the Nation," that called upon President Yar'Adua to resign. The PDP members reportedly planned to attack these politicians and their homes, but a police presence prevented such reprisals. (N.B.: PolSpec, who contacted several of the seven by telephone, determined that none currently is in the state. END NOTE.) The PDP group called for Masari's dismissal from the party, while some reportedly asked the Emir of Katsina to remove Masari's traditional title.

THE "WAYWARD" SEVEN

13. (SBU) Embassy provides the following biographic sketches on the seven Katsina politicians who signed the petition (along with 47 other Nigerians):

-- Dr. Usman Bugaje, a former member of the House of

Representatives, worked as special advisor to then-Vice President Atiku. He currently serves as the National Secretary of opposition Action Congress (AC) political party.

Known for his independence and opposition to the "status quo," Bugaje reportedly was a long-time friend of President Yar'Adua before falling out with him previously.

-- Dr. Ishaq Idris Kurfi served as Managing Director of the Katsina State Water Board. He also gained election to the House of Representatives as a candidate of the opposition All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP).

-- Mutari Lawal worked as a political advisor to Yar'Adua when the latter served as Katsina Governor from 1999 to 2007.

-- Aminu Bello Masari served as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 2003 to 2007. He unsuccessfully sought the PDP Katsina gubernatorial nomination in 2007. A member of the Katsina Emirate, he holds the traditional title "Dalatun Katsina." According to the press, Masari is leading the opposition in his state to the idea of President Yar'Adua seeking a second term.

-- Bashir Idris Nadabo worked as a popular two-term, local government PDP area chairman and ANPP member of the House of Representatives, having switched from the PDP to the ANPP in 2003. He led the group that called for the impeachment of then-President Olusegun Obasanjo. According to the press, he earned the nickname "Pia-Pia" (an Igbo term for "insecticide") within Katsina political circles, because of

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his reputation for speaking out against corruption and poor governance during his tenure in the House of Representatives.

Nadabo has openly criticized President Yar'Adua, declaring in a July 2009 interview that the President would "certainly disappoint" Nigerians.

-- Kabir Yahaya, popularly known as "KY," first met Yar'Adua at Katsina State University in 1966 and remained a close associate for over 40 years. He served in Yar'Adua's State Cabinet as Katsina State Commissioner of Health from 1999 to 2000. In a 2007 press interview, Yahaya said that, as Governor, the President had performed below average and he did not expect high hopes for a Yar'Adua Presidency.

-- Sadiq Yar'Adua formerly worked as Executive Director of the Nigerian Maritime Authority, Chairman of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, Chief of Staff to Masari from 1983 to 1987, and was a House Representatives member from 1999 to 2003, during which he competed for Speaker. As a leader of the Restoration Group, he has pressed the PDP internally for electoral reforms. In a June 2009 press interview, Sadiq Yar'Adua said that he had known the President for over 33 years. While he said he used to be a "Yar'Adua boy," he eventually became a harsh critic, even calling the President "deceptive" and "unforgiving." (N.B.: Although Sadiq Yar'Adua shares the President's last name, they are not related. END NOTE.)

PUBLIC CRITICISM, PRIVATE CONCURRENCE

14. (C) Despite public criticism of these seven politicians, some Katsina residents privately acknowledged to PolSpec in Katsina December 8 that they agreed with many points in the document that they signed. A Katsina academic told PolSpec December 7 that his main concern, and the primary concern of most residents, involved the state leadership's preoccupation with the President's health, resulting in a standstill in Katsina government operations.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Some Katsina residents, who have long known Yar'Adua's health issues, appear to be looking beyond him as an individual to consider post-Yar'Adua options. That said, other Katsina politicians worry that they will lose influence and power if they no longer enjoy their connection to the Presidency. END COMMENT.

¶6. (U) The Embassy coordinated this telegram with ConGen Lagos.

SANDERS